



Using Church of Scotland Parochial Registers

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Church of Scotland Records

“Church records are an excellent source for accurate information on names, dates, and places of birth, marriage, and death. Most people in Scotland before the mid-nineteenth century are listed in church records.” “Scotland Church Records,” FamilySearch Wiki

Historical Background

- Prior to 1500's, Scotland was Catholic; same as all of Europe.
- In 1500's, John Knox spread Protestantism throughout England; conflict with Catholic Queen Mary.
- In 1552, General Provincial Council ordered parishes to keep registers of baptisms & marriages. Earliest registers from 1553.
- In 1560, Catholic Church abolished and Presbyterianism grew in strength.
- In 1600, a calendar change; year now began on January 1st.
- In 1606, church government established in Scotland by James I.
- In 1616, 1636, and again in 1699, laws were passed requiring ministers to keep registers.
- In 1690, Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) was 'established' permanently.
- Lord Hardwick Act – many marriages in established church parishes from 25 Mar 1754
- Between 1733-1843 - many break-offs from the Established Church that affected records (Non-conformists)
 - Secessionists - seceded from the Established Church—still Presbyterian
 - Dissenters - other denominations (Episcopalian, Baptist, Catholic, etc.)

The Organization of the Church of Scotland:

- The General Assembly is the highest organizational body and serves as the final ecclesiastical court of appeals.
 - A Synod is made up of several presbyteries and serves as the court of appeals for those presbyteries.
 - A Presbytery is made up of several parishes and serves as the court of appeals for those parishes.
 - A Parish is the lowest governing body.
 - A Chapelry or chapel of ease is a small church serving a distant part of a parish.
- “Scotland Church Records,” FamilySearch Wiki

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Baptisms/Christenings:

Date and place of event
Name and sex of child
Father's name and residence
Mother's name and maiden name
Also, residence, father's occupation, witnesses

Marriages:

Date and place
Names of bride and groom
Residences
May include - groom's occupation, marital status, fathers' names, witnesses' names

Burials:

Name of deceased
Date and place
May include - occupation, age, relatives' names, residence, 'mortcloth dues' (fee paid for use of funeral cloth/pall draped over the casket).

Things to Remember About Burial Records:

- Most of Scotland's population were buried in Church of Scotland parish churchyards
- Most parishes did not record burials (it was not a church sacrament)
- To locate cemetery records, check the Family History Library catalogue
- Tombstones are called Monumental Inscriptions
- Contact local family history societies in Scotland
- Also check online for burial registers .

Kirk Session Records

The Kirk Session was and still is the commonly used term for the court of elders in the local congregation.

Examples of What Could Be in Kirk Session Records:

Accounts
Burial Register
Cash/ Money Disbursements
Charters
Collections
Communion Rolls
Correspondence
Deacon's Court Minutes
Electoral Rolls
Examination Rolls
Grave Digger's Accounts

Heritors' Minutes
Instruments of Sasine and Accounts
Lairs and Headstones
Letterbooks
List of Poor
Marriage Dues
Minutes
Mission Accounts
Mortcloth Dues
Parish Census
Proclamations
Recorder's Cash Book
Recorder's Day Book
Seat Letting/Rental Book
Treasurer's Account

Finding Old Parish Registers

"Unlike any other country in the British Isles, each parish in Scotland has been assigned a number. These numbers were determined by arranging the parishes in alphabetical order within their respective counties, and then numbering them consecutively throughout all of Scotland."

FamilySearch Wiki

Books containing maps that show parish boundaries:

Civil Parishes and Counties of North East Scotland Showing Overall Dates of Old Parochial Records: Held in Edinburgh and Available Worldwide on Microfilm [Scotland]: Aberdeen and North East Scotland Family History Society[198-]. (Family History Library Map Case 941 E7c pt. 4)

The Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers, 2nd ed. Chichester, England: Phillimore & Co. Ltd, 1995. (Family History Library Book 941 E7pa)

Parish Maps of Scotland. Salt Lake City, Utah: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1991. (Family History Library Book 941 E7ch; Fiche 6036350)

Phillips' Handy Atlas of the Counties of Scotland 1881. London, England: G. Phillip, 1881. (Family History Library Book 941 E7p; Film 423175)

Online Resources

www.familysearch.org

www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk

www.ancestry.com

www.books.google – books online

www.archive.org

www.genuki.org.uk

www.safhs.org.uk

Reasons Your Family Is Not In Church Records

- Some families were lax in having events recorded.
- Traditional/local customs may have prevented a marriage or burial being recorded.
- Political and religious upheavals may have caused events to not be performed/recorded.
- Names may have been changed or were variations.
- Baptisms may have occurred years after the birth or several siblings were baptized at once.
- Some Nonconformist marriages may be found in Church of Scotland registers starting in 1754
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Research Suggestions

Keep in mind the traditional naming patterns:

- 1st son – named after father's father
- 2nd son – named after mother's father
- 3rd son – named after father
- 1st daughter – named after mother's mother
- 2nd daughter – named after father's mother
- 3rd daughter - named after mother

Also keep in mind the following:

- 1820 & 1855 - new registers with delayed entries recorded. Search for missing baptisms in these years.
- Consider handwriting, condition of records & availability.
- There was nearly 40% nonconformity by 1851